The Earl of Rochester

BY

PARKE P. FLOURNOY

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The Rt Hon.ble John Earle of Rochester
Baron Wilmot of Adderbury in
England, & Viscount Wilmot of Atholne
in Ireland. Born Ap. 1648 Died 26 July. 1680.

The EARL *of* ROCHESTER

His Career as a Courtier and its end.

(A SOUL CLINIC)

By Parke P. Flournoy, D. D., Litt. D.

"Doth wisdom cry?
* * * * *
To you, O men, I call."

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FOREWORD

Lord Ronald Gower, writing in 1875 of Bishop Burnet's book, says:

"Some years have passed since I first met with a copy of this work, and I shall not readily forget the effect its perusal had upon my mind.

"I believe that the good Bishop of Salisbury's account of the last days of poor young Rochester, if carefully read, would make more impression on the mind of a . . . young man (supposing him not utterly wanting in conscience and brains) than a hundred sermons from the pulpit would effect."

Those who read the following pages intelligently will be likely to agree with him.

INTRODUCTION

John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, was one of the handsomest, wittiest, wickedest sinners of his age. Bishop Burnet immortalized himself by producing his *History of the Reformation of the Church of England* and his *History of His Own Time;* but, amongst many smaller works, he published one under the title, *Some Passages of the Life and Death of John, Earl of Rochester,* "which," Dr. Johnson has said, "the critic ought to read for its elegance, the philosopher for its arguments, and the saint for its piety." This little book Dr. Parke P. Flournoy, distinguished author and man of God, has reduced and presented effectively in this present brochure, *The Earl of Rochester,* the reading of which we hope will be a pleasure and a blessing to many.

THOMAS CARY JOHNSON,
Union Theological Seminary.

June 21, 1927.

The Earl of Rochester

His Career as a Courtier and Its End

A Soul Clinic

HERE we shall find an interesting case in such a clinic, with the narrative and conclusion of a very able diagnostician, Bishop Burnet, who retired to Holland, for safety, in the reign of James the Second whose persecution was beginning to take on the character of that of Bloody Mary. He was instrumental in preparations for the occupation of the English throne by William and Mary, and accompanied them in their coming to England. His two great volumes, *The History of His Own Time,* are too well known to require more than a mere mention: but a very little book now very little known, written before this, gives us his account of the "religious experience" of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, a favorite of Charles the Second, from the beginning of his reign.

Of all the royal courts of the time when Charles came back from the Continent to occupy the British throne, it is probable that his Court was the most morally corrupt. And

the young Earl of Rochester became not only a Courtier, but a boon companion of the king. His father, who had died before the Restoration, had aided Charles, after his crushing defeat at the battle of Worcester, to make his escape from England, sharing his perils, having been most prominent among those who fought in the endeavor to place him on the throne. Thus, it was natural that this earl's son, a charming young university student, should be introduced to his court, and eventually become a favorite in that circle. This proved a sad result of his father's devotion to the Stuart cause; for the king, himself a man of amiable disposition and attractive personality, made of the young nobleman an associate in the life he lived. What that life was is well known. One sentence of Macaulay gives us a glimpse of it:

"The whole reign of this most brilliant and amiable . . . but most worthless of all the Stuarts, was but one saturnalia and grand orgie of vice, licentiousness, meanness, and riot."

Into all this, Rochester was introduced in his eighteenth year, after he had left the university and taken a tour through the Continent, with a most excellent "governor," Dr. Balfour, under whose influence he was brought

back to his interest in learning and literature, and turned from his boyish intemperance. But after his return to England there came a sad change. His indulgence in drinking seems to have begun at the university, with the excitement of welcoming Charles to the English throne, after the fall of Richard Cromwell, and the universal dread of the army, which followed it; a dread which explains the ecstasy of joy at the return of the prince from exile.

Rochester's mother had afforded him the best possible advantages of education in his boyhood, after his father's death in 1658. Bishop Burnet says of him that he was "extraordinarily proficient at his book; and those shining parts which have since appeared with so much lustre, began then to show themselves. He acquired the Latin to such perfection that, to his dying day, he retained a great relish for the fineness and beauty of that tongue." But while he was a university student, Charles was brought back from the Continent, and we are told, received at Dover "with joyful tears," and, "his journey to London was one continued triumph. The whole country through which he passed bore the aspect of a universal fair day." * * * "He was received with open arms, and reinstated without being asked to give a guarantee, or to make a concession."

This wild jollification all over England was probably wildest among the students of the university where young Rochester was, and it was accompanied with much intemperate drinking. Under this influence, notwithstanding his temporary reformation under the kind and wise tutelage of Dr. Balfour; after his return to England, where he came under the bad influences about the throne, the fatal habit returned, and others worse still, if that were possible, were formed amid these unhealthful associations.

Bishop Burnet describes him as, at this time, a "graceful and well shaped person, tall and well made, if not a little too slender. He was well bred, and what, by a modest behavior natural to him, and a civility almost become as natural, his conversation was easy and obliging. He had a strange vivacity of thought and vigour of expression that was scarcely imitable. His style was clear and strong. When he used figures, they were very lively, and yet enough out of the common road." * * * "Few men had a bolder flight of fancy, more steadily governed by judgment than he had." It may be added that the poet, Dryden, his contemporary, gave extravagant praise to his genius as a poet, though, later, jealousy sprung up between the two. It is not strange that "a

young man so made and improved was very acceptable at court."

Rochester soon distinguished himself as a man of unusual courage, in the war with Holland, in which he took an active part. In the battle against the Dutch fleet, one of the ships was not acting properly, and when Sir Edward Sprague, the English commander, called for a volunteer to bear his orders to the captain of that ship, the young Earl of Rochester went in a small boat to carry them: "It was as desperate an attempt as ever was made. During the whole action, the Earl of Rochester showed as brave and resolute a courage as was possible. He went in a little boat through all the shot, and delivered his message and returned back to Sir Edward." "He had so entirely laid down the intemperance that was growing upon him before his travels that he hated nothing more. But, falling into company that loved these excesses, he was, though not without difficulty, and by many steps, brought back to it again. And the natural heat of his fancy, being inflamed by wine, made him so extravagantly pleasant, that many, to be more diverted by that humour, studied to engage him in deeper and deeper intemperance, which, at length, did so entirely subdue him, that, as he told me," says

Bishop Burnet, "for five years together he was continually drunk." We are told that: "Violent love of pleasure and a disposition to extravagant mirth," were his characteristics, and that, "The one involved him in great sensuality; the other led him to many odd adventures and frolicks, in which he was often in hazard of his life."

He told the Bishop that though he never "premeditated mischief to other persons through court influence," "Yet he laid out his wit very freely in libels and satires, in which he had a peculiar talent of mixing his wit with his malice, and fitting both with such apt words, that men were tempted to be pleased with him." The king, it seems, was so infatuated, that, though he himself and his familiars were often lampooned by this witty poet who was again and again banished from the court for such offences, Rochester was as often recalled to amuse the pleasure-loving monarch, even though once sent to the Tower.

But we must turn from this court scene of wit, ribaldry and licentiousness, to others of a different character. As we study the case of the conversion of this courtier, it seems proper to look at some of the events which turned his thoughts to serious matters. Though so full of mirth, indulgence and caprice, we shall

find him a man capable of profound thinking upon the greatest questions and problems with which an immortal being has to do.

The first great question he began to consider seems to have been that which we find asked in the book of Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Two occurrences brought this question vividly before him. The scene of one was a battle on the sea, and that of the other, an English dinner table. The first of these reminds one of much that is now discussed, not only by superstitious people in general, but by scientists and literary men like Sir Oliver Lodge, Conan Doyle and Maeterlinck, as to intercourse between the living and the dead. Both of these occurrences which came under his observation seem to have been providentially used to disabuse his mind of that materialism which leads so many to disbelieve in a future state, and to give themselves up to the Epicurean resolve, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Two gentlemen went with him in the same ship in the war with Holland and one of them entered with him "into a formal engagement, not without ceremonies of religion, that if either of them died, he should appear, and give the other notice of the future state, if there were any."

This gentleman had a presentiment that he should be killed in the battle to be fought. In this battle both the men were killed by the same cannon ball. Says Bishop Burnet, "The Earl of Rochester told me that these passages they had in their minds made some impression on him, that there were separate beings; and that the soul, either by a natural sagacity, or some secret notice communicated to it, had a sort of divination. But that gentleman never appearing was a great snare to him all the rest of his life." The meaning seems to be that the failure of this necromantic test tempted him to doubt the immortality of the soul. This is, no doubt, one of the dangers attending the forbidden practice of trying to peer through the veil between the two worlds. It is not at all improbable that many who are told that there is a real communication with those who have passed the bourne, but find no proof of it by such a weird experiment, come to doubt the reality of a future world and a future life, and fall back into materialism, a hopeless, dreary slough indeed.

The other case was that of a clergyman who, sitting at the dinner table in the evening where it was remarked that there were thirteen present, was playfully pointed to as the one who should die; and suddenly remem-

bered that he had dreamed that he should. "He fell into some disorder, and said he was confident he *was* to die before morning: but he being in prefect health, it was not much minded. It was Saturday night, and he was to preach the next day. He went to his chamber and sat up late, as appeared by the burning of his candle, and had been preparing notes for his sermon; but was found dead in his bed the next day." "These things," he said, "made him believe that the soul was a substance distinct from matter; and this often returned into his thoughts." "But that which perfected his persuasion of it was that, in the sickness which brought him so near his death, before I first knew him; when his spirits were so low and spent that he could not move nor stir, and did not expect to live an hour, he said his reason and judgment were so clear and strong that, from thence, he was fully persuaded that death was not spending or dissolution of the soul; but only the separation of it from matter."

"He had, in that sickness great remorses for his past life; but he told me they were rather general and dark horrors than any conviction of sinning against God. He was sorry he [had] lived so as to waste his strength so soon, or that he had brought such an ill name

upon himself; and had an agony in his mind about it, which he knew not well how to suppress. But at such times, though he complied with his friends, in suffering divines to be sent for, he said he had no great mind to it; and that it was a piece of his breeding to [have them] pray by him, in which he joined but little himself."

Bishop Burnet tells us how he was brought into that intimate relation which he had with him during the last year of his life: "The occasion which led me into so particular a knowledge of him, was an intimation given me by a gentleman of his acquaintance of his desire to see me. This was some time in October, 1679, when he was slowly recovering out of a great disease. He had understood that I had often attended on one well known to him, that died the summer before." In the many conversations which ensued in the sick room, one of the first matters discussed was his difficulty of believing the truth of the Christian religion: "He believed there was a Supreme Being; he could not think the world was made by chance, and the regular course of nature seemed to demonstrate the eternal power of its Author; but thought that its Author had none of those affections of love, hatred, etc.," attributed to Him in the Bible. He could not

believe that "there was to be either reward or punishment." He thought that we should "better not think much of [about] Him; and to love God seemed to him a presumptuous thing, and the heat of fanciful men." He thought that "there should be no other religious worship, but a general celebration of that Being." He "was not persuaded that there was a special providence, nor that prayers were of much use."

"I told him that his notion of God was so low that the Supreme Being seemed to be nothing but nature." [This seems to be pure pantheism.]

The reply was, "As for the government of the world, if we believe the Supreme Being *made* it, there is no reason to think He does not *govern* it." * * * "If we conceive the Divine understanding to be as far above ours, as His power of creating and framing the whole universe is above our limited activity, we will no more think of the government of the world [as]a distraction to Him."

In view of "the joys of a good man, especially in view of death," "he often confessed that, whether the business of religion was true or not, he thought those who had the persuasions of it, and lived so that they had quiet consciences, and believed God governed the

world, and acquiesced in His providence, and had hope of an endless blessedness in another state, the happiest men in the world; and said, he would give all he was master of to be under these persuasions, and to have the supports and joys that must needs flow from them."

Yet, as to a Divine Revelation, he "could not comprehend how God should reveal His secrets to mankind." The reply of the Bishop in part, was, as to the evidence of it:

"So, if the credibility of the thing [Divine revelation], the innocence and distinterestedness of the witnesses, the number of them, and the publickest confirmations that could be given, do concur to persuade us of any matter of fact, it is a vain thing to say, because it is *possible* for so many men to agree in a lie, that, therefore, *these* have done it."

We have before us here a man as little likely to become a devout Christian as any we could find. He is very near the end of his earthly career, a moral derelict, and a physical wreck, after a course of unbridled indulgence. He had disregarded the counsels of his wise and good guardian in his youth, and plunged into a very maelstrom of indulgence of appetite and passion, so that it had become second

nature to yield to them. Indeed, he argued that it seemed "unreasonable to imagine these appetites were put into a man, only to be restrained and curbed to such a narrowness" as we find inculcated in Christian teaching. To this subterfuge, which so many have used, whether avowedly or not, to justify themselves in such courses, his good friend replied that "the same argument would, then, apply to revenge, coveteousness, etc., which unrestrained, would lead to murder, theft and other crimes." But we know that even human law brings needful restraint in these things. Bishop Burnet advised the avoidance of occasions "that may kindle these flames"; to "keep well employed," etc., but warned him that his own strength would be insufficient for subduing these forces so hostile to his highest interests, warning him that his philosophy, in which he trusted for guidance and help, would fail him in the struggle, and that he could not hope to escape the power of the habits so long cultivated, "unless the mind does invariably comply with and delight in the dictates of virtue. And that could not be effected, except a man's nature were internally regenerated and changed by a higher principle. Till that came about, corrupt nature would be strong, and philosophy but

feeble." "This," Rochester replied, "seemed to him like enthusiasm or canting."

His instructor forewarned him that "nothing would avail till he applied to God for inward assistances."

A little sign of yielding may, perhaps, appear in the response made to this appeal; as he admitted that it is "reasonable to suppose God a Being of such goodness that He would give His assistance to such as desired it." Still, he continued cavilling, and said, it might all be "the effect of fancy."

At a later visit, in his last sickness, however, he told Bishop Burnet that "he had another sense of what we had talked of concerning prayer and inward assistances." "He did not seem determined against Providence," we are assured by his friend. Yet he still doubted about conscious existence in a future life, and "that there could be any remembrance" of the present.

To quote further, "He thought it more likely that the soul 'began anew,' [after death] and that 'her sense of what she had done in this body, lying in figures that are made in the brain, as soon as she dislodged, all these perished, and that the soul went into another state to begin a new course.' " Bishop

Burnet answered that "it was no inconceivable thing that either the soul, by its own strength, or by the means of some subtiler organs, which might be fitted for it in another state, should still remember as well as think." He remarked, too, what we must all acknowledge, that, it is "hard to understand *how* we remember *now*."

There were other stumbling blocks in the way of his belief in Christianity. "He did not understand the business of inspiration," we are told, and we may reply, "Who does?" The "mystery" of many things, too, in the Scriptures troubled him. But we, at least, could hardly expect a revelation from God which had no mystery about it, when one of the greatest of scientists in the world* has told us that the mysteries of the Bible bear a small proportion to the mysteries of nature which were the subjects of his investigations. The Bishop told him that belief in testimony "was the hinge on which all government and justice in the world depended," and showed him the clear and reasonable evidence for believing in the Scriptures which bring to us the revelation of God's mercy in the saving of sinners, and that if we *resist* the force of this evidence, "It is, in plain English, to say, 'we are re-

* Huxley (?)

solved, let the evidence be what it will, we will not believe it.' "

But the greatest of all the difficulties in his accepting Christianity as true was that which is the chief cause of unbelief in all ages—the inconsistency of the lives of many who profess to believe. The good Bishop tells us:

"He told me plainly, there was nothing that gave him, and many others, a more secret encouragement in their ill ways than that those who pretend to believe, lived so that they could not be thought to be in earnest when they said it. For he was sure religion was either a mere contrivance, or the most important thing that could be; so that, if he once believed, he would set himself in earnest to live suitably to it."

This snare for his soul was not set by the laity of his acquaintance alone, by any means. He goes on to tell of the clergy at Charles's court, that "The aspirings he had observed at court of some of the clergy, with the servile ways they took to attain to preferment, and the animosities of those of several parties about trifles made him often think they suspected the things were not true, which, in their sermons and discourses, they so earnestly

recommended. Of this he had gathered many instances. Of this, his friend remarks: "I knew many of them were mistakes; yet, I could not deny but that some of them might be too true."

The Bishop then turns to his contemporaries of the clergy, and gives them a most solemn warning; and thus continues his narrative: "But I said to him, upon this head, that no good man could continue to live in the practice of any known sin. Yet such might, by the violence or surprise of temptation, be, of a sudden, overcome to do an ill thing, to their great grief all their life after." * * * "But how bad soever many are, it cannot be denied that there are also many, both of the clergy and of the laity, who give great and real demonstrations of the power religion has over them." After giving proofs of this in many lives, he continues:

"And, in all such cases, we are to judge of men rather by the course of their lives than by their errors that they, through infirmity or surprise may have slipped into."

Here we see a faithful guide leading a sinful soul through many obstructions and pitfalls, through mists and darkness, towards

the Light, of which there are, as yet, but few and fitful glimpses gained.

But his friend was soon to have more encouragement to go on, instructing, encouraging and warning of dangers and missteps. He says:

"The issue of all our discourses was this:

"He told me he saw vice and impiety were as contrary to humane society as wild beasts let loose would be: and that, therefore, he firmly resolved to change the whole method of his life; to become strictly just and true, to be chaste and temperate, to forbear swearing and irreligious discourse, to worship and pray to his Maker; and that, though he was not arrived at a full persuasion of Christianity he would never employ his wit more to run it down or to corrupt others."

"To all this I answered, that it would be very uneasy to him, unless vicious inclinations were removed. It would, otherwise, be a perpetual constraint, nor could it be effected without an inward principle to change him; and that was only to be had by applying himself to God for it, in frequent and earnest prayers. And I was sure if his mind were once cleared of these disorders, and cured of these distempers which vice brought on it,

so great an understanding would soon see through those flights of wit that do feed atheism and irreligion, which have a false glittering in them that dazzles some weak-sighted minds, who have not capacity enough to penetrate further than the surfaces of things."

After one of his partial recoveries of strength, Rochester left London, and took a journey to another part of England; but his disease was making its fatal progress, and he came back to his lodge at Woodstock Park, as the narrator tells us, "wounded in body and mind." And it is added, "Now the hand of God touched him, and, as he told me, 'It was not only a dark melancholy over his mind such as he had frequently felt; but a most penetrating, cutting sorrow. So that, though in his body he suffered extreme pain for some weeks, yet the agony of his mind sometimes swallowed up the sense of what he felt in his body.'"

And now we find in this man, who had lived in sinful disregard of the interests of others, even those nearest and dearest, a yearning for the spiritual benefit of a fellow sinner. "He told me, and gave it me in charge, to tell it to one for whom he was much concerned, that, though there were nothing to

come after this life, yet all the pleasures he had ever known in sin, were not worth that torture he felt in his mind. He considered he had not only neglected and dishonored his Maker, [but] had drawn many others into the like impieties, so that he looked on himself as one that was in great danger of being damned." O that all of us could bring sinful men to look, thus, down into this pit toward which they are tending!

"He then set himself wholly to turn to God unfeignedly, and to do all that was possible in that little remainder of his life which was before him, to redeem those great portions of it that he had formerly so ill employed."

God, in His great mercy to this sinful man, who was to be made "a miracle of grace," brought to him wise and earnest helpers besides our good bishop, who tells us that "he was visited every week by that truly primitive prelate, the Lord Bishop of Oxford, who took care that he might not, on terms more easy than safe, be at peace with himself * * * and that he might not, on the one hand, satisfy himself with too superficial a repentance, nor on the other hand, be out of measure oppressed with sorrow without hope." The minister of the parish also pursued the same course, and we are impressed with the contrast here with

the easy entrance of the strait gate which seems to be effected in some evangelistic services which we have witnessed in our times, when it seems so very easy to *become* a Christian, and so hard to give any very decided evidence of the fact afterwards.

It may surprise us that from these three undoubtedly wise and earnest men of God, dealing with this poor sinner, "pulling him out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh," we have as yet heard nothing about "Christ crucified." But we must remember that Wesley and Whitefield had not yet been sent of God to awaken the Church of England from its long continued slumbers; or it may be explained by the conviction of these good men that in this almost desperate case it was necessary that the "law-work" should not be mingled with anything else at first—that Sinai should continue to quake and thunder until the sinner should be thoroughly prepared to welcome the sweet music of the good news, the gospel of Calvary, the torn veil and the open mercy seat, the open sepulchre, the open heavens and the New Jerusalem. Paul said, "But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died:" and, at least, in such cases as those of the persecutor, Paul, and the libertine, Rochester,

it seems, that it is necessary that there should be in the sinner's consciousness the resurrection of sin—an awful spectre for the conscience,—before the resurrection of Christ, risen for justification, can replace that horror with joyous hope.

From the narrative of Burnet, the Lord Bishop of Salisbury, it seems, the bringing of perfect peace to the troubled soul was not accomplished through the instrumentality of himself or the Lord Bishop of Oxford alone; but through another who was without world-wide fame and with no high-sounding titles, Mr. Parsons, the truly pious chaplain of his mother, "that good and worthy man," as described by the narrator.

And now we come to what this "good and worthy man" had done. Bishop Burnet, received from the Earl, a most earnest entreaty, to come to him on July 20, 1680. On account of the mistake of the French man-servant who admitted him, he was detained several hours from entrance to the sick room, where was very soon to be enacted "the last scene of all":

"I cannot easily express," he says, "the transport he was in, when he awoke and saw me by him. He broke out in the tenderest expressions concerning my kindness in coming

so far to see *such a one,* using terms of great abhorrence concerning himself, which I forbear to relate." "He told me, as his strength served him, at several snatches (for he was then so low that he could not hold up discourse long at once) what sense he had of his past life; what sad apprehension for having so offended his Maker, and dishonored his Redeemer; what horrors he had gone through, and how much his mind was turned to call on God and on his crucified Saviour; so that he hoped that he should obtain mercy. For he believed that he had sincerely repented, and had now a calm in his mind, after that storm he had been in for some weeks. He had strong persuasions of his admittance to heaven, of which he spake not once without some extraordinary emotion." * * * "But he made me pray with him, and spoke of his conversion to God as a thing now grown up in him to a settled and calm serenity."

"He was very anxious to know my opinion of a death-bed repentance. I told him that before I gave any resolution of that, it would be convenient that I should be acquainted more particularly with the circumstances and progress of his repentance. Upon this he satisfied me in many particulars. He said that he was now satisfied of the truth of Christian-

ity, and the power of inward grace; of which he gave me this strange account:

"He said Mr. Parsons read to him the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and compared that with the history of our Saviour's Passion, that he might see a prophecy concerning it; and written many ages before it was done; which the Jews that blasphemed Jesus Christ still kept in their hands as a book divinely inspired." "He said unto me, as he heard it read, he felt an inward force upon him which did so enlighten his mind, and convince him, that he could resist no longer; for the words had an authority which did shoot rays or beams in his mind, so that he was not only convinced by the reasonings he had about it, which not only satisfied his understanding, but by a power which did so effectually constrain him, that he did ever as firmly believe in his Saviour as if he had seen Him in the clouds." This is evidently a reference to our Lord's coming "with clouds," when "every eye shall see Him."

We are strikingly reminded by this experience, of that of the treasurer of Queen Candace, who, on his return from Jerusalem whither he had come from Ethiopia to worship, was reading this very 53rd chapter of Isaiah in his chariot when Philip joined him,

as told in the 8th chapter of the Acts. Millions, since that day, have had the same blessed experience, in reading, or hearing this chapter read.

So we see that the blessing came in its *fullness,* not from the reasonings of the Lord Bishops of Oxford and Salisbury (Old Sarum), which undoubtedly had their preparatory influence; but from the word of God Himself, read by "that good and worthy man, Mr. Parsons, his mother's chaplain."

Yet, other millions, alas, read these same words, or hear them from the pulpit, even on communion occasions, when in the symbols of the great sacrifice, the fulfillment of them is set before their very eyes; and fail to see that here is positive proof, to the intelligent mind, that Isaiah "spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost."

The good bishop was overwhelmed with a flood of joy at this result—a great sinner, evidently saved by grace, with eyes now opened to see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." For he goes on to say:

"He made it to be read to him so often, that he had got it by heart; and went through a great part of it in discourse with me, with a sort of heavenly pleasure, giving me his

reflections on it. Some few, I remember: 'who hath believed our report?' Here he said was foretold the opposition the gospel was to meet with from such wretches as he was. 'He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.' On this he said, 'The meanness of His appearance and person made vain and foolish people despise Him, because he came not in such a fool's coat as they delight in.'

"What he said on the other parts, I do not well remember; and, indeed, I was so affected with what he said then to me, that the general transport I was under during the whole discourse made me less capable to remember those particulars, as I wish I had done."

And now, in this death chamber we see a man, at the early age of thirty-three years dying from the dissipation of the noblest powers of mind and body, through twenty years of that short life. Of him, it may truly be said, "Thou hast destroyed thyself." And yet, through the infinite love and mercy of God our Saviour, there is mingled with the great sorrow there, an even greater joy:

With him is his deeply wronged, yet long-suffering and affectionate wife, joining with him in that sacramental feast of our blessed

Lord—a foretaste of that heavenly feast to which he was departing; and here are their beloved children—the son, who would succeed to his title, and the three daughters, to all of whom he could speak his last words of loving counsel.

And we, sinners too, saved by grace, looking on this scene, surely cannot forbear exclaiming, in deepest gratitude and love: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift."

The thing which finally conquered Rochester's doubts was the clear prophetical portraiture of Christ; especially that drawn in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. It might be well for each reader to peruse carefully the twenty-second Psalm and the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and ask himself if he could be credulous enough to believe that they *could* have been written centuries before Christ (as we know they were) without divine inspiration. Here is a miracle, not for the eyes, but for the mind—a miracle of divine knowledge—a miracle which stamps on prophecy the seal of Him who said, through this same prophet Isaiah (46: 9, 10), "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done."

Our Blessed Lord said of the Holy Scriptures, "They are they which testify of me." And now, for any one who may have been troubled over the higher-critical speculations, it may be well to turn to the words of the eminent Oriel Professor of Oxford University, the late Dr. T. K. Cheyne. Dr. Cheyne says: "If again, you believe in the true, though veiled, Divinity of Jesus Christ, and humbly accept his decrees on all points essentially connected with his messiahship, you will feel loyally anxious to interpret the Old Testament as He, beyond question, interpreted it. You will believe His words when he says: 'The Scriptures, * * * they are they which testify of me.' You will reply to non-Christian critics, 'In spite of modern criticism and exegesis, there must be some sense in which the words of my Lord are true. He cannot have mistaken the meaning of His own Bible.' * * * 'He who received not the Spirit by measure, cannot have been fundamentally mistaken in the Messianic character of Psalms and Prophecies?' "

In his "The Prophecies of Isaiah" (Vol. II, pp. 20-50 and 191-208 especially) he cites particular proof of this, giving (p. 208) the experience of the Earl of Rochester as an in-

teresting case of the thorough conviction of a doubter by the presentation to him of this miracle of mind shown in the prophecies of the life and death of Christ, and their fulfillment (ages after they were written) as related in the Gospels.

A real conversion is a miracle. It is not a miracle of a spectacular character like the stilling of the sea, or the multiplication of the loaves and fishes to feed a famishing multitude, or the calling of the dead from the grave. But it has a feature which is common to all miracles; it is an evidence of the working of Divine power, by which a sinner is "born again," "born from above."

Some conversions are much more *striking* proofs of the power of God working in a human soul than others. In the case of the apostle Paul, for instance, the turning of the cruel persecutor into the tender loving, utterly devoted and consecrated, Apostle to the Gentiles, was far more striking than the conversion of a cocmparatively blameless boy or girl brought up under careful parental training, and surrounded by the best Christian social influences.

But all cases of true conversion are the result of a new birth—a birth not only new,

but "from above," brought about by the Holy Spirit, and (John 3: 3ff.) that, through His word, as the instrument. (I Peter 1: 23.) In this case of Rochester's conversion, we see three faithful men, two Bishops and an humble Chaplain, dealing with an immortal soul. What a picture this is for those of us who are called to do this! What deep thoughtfulness and carefulness on the part of all! But, the last is the first, the humblest, noblest, using the word of God, pointing to *"Christ Crucified."*

There are several lessons of unspeakable importance to be learned from Bishop Burnet's narrative for all of us.

The first of all is, what the Apostle Peter tells us: "For the prophecy came not, in old time, by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (II Peter 1: 21.) The full conviction of this, from the prophecy of our Saviour's sacrifice of Himself in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, written ages before it came to pass, led Rochester to believe on Christ and be saved. This could have come from God only; for He alone could declare "The end from the beginning." (Isaiah 46: 10). Here is a miracle of knowledge, a miracle which Rochester saw, and "believed to the saving of the soul."

The second lesson is, that a real conversion is the result of a new birth, another miracle wrought in a human mind, for "Jesus answered and said unto him [Nicodemus], Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3 : 3.)

The third is, that this new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit performed in a human soul. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (V. 6.) "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye MUST be born again." (V. 7.)

The fourth is that this new birth is brought about by the instrumentality of *the word of God*. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed [like that of the withering grass and the falling flower], but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." (I Peter 1 : 23.)

The fifth lesson is that this precious seed of the Word of God should be received by faith, and with prayer that the Holy Spirit may open our eyes to see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your

Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that *ask* Him." (Luke 11 : 13.)

And for every sinner, feeling the burden of his guilt, what encouragement there is in this case, for the full assurance that, through Christ, every one of such, even the "chief," will be saved in believing on Him!